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Soviet high-tech spies

By MAX LERNER

THE story of the expulsion of 55 Soviet "diplomats" — in reality, technical spies — is a story of trying to control the high larceny of high technology.

The weepers and moaners on the media panels — including the Soviet "journalists" — stress the tit-for-tat aspect as an escalation game. They worry about imperiling the post-Reykjavik climate for arms talks.

This is to miss the point of Soviet and American purposes. Ronald Reagan wants a good climate for talks, but sees no reason for buying it by playing down the espionage issue, which stands on its own.

Mikhail Gorbachev has to think of "linkages," because he is in a weaker bargaining position on technology. So he speaks softly because he doesn't carry a big technology stick.

In his latest speech he chides Reagan for the unnamed "circles" in Washington who are hostile to a Soviet agreement. But in fact he needs the arms talks to get an agreement, and he needs his spies to reach a position of greater strength.

He is hurt badly by the lopping off of his UN and Washington and San Francisco spy staffs. So he "retaliates" in token fashion by sending five more U.S. diplomats home and pulling out the entire Soviet sub-staff of workers at the



Soviet UN staffers ousted in first wave of expulsions last month wait for flight at Kennedy.

Moscow Embassy (who have also been spying).

The key term in the political vocabulary of the fearing liberals has become "sensitive." We must be "sensitive" and "sensitized" to the feelings of the Russians lest we disturb them and hurt the chances of "peace."

The counterculture of the '60s in America had much that has lasted, but its psychological "touchy-feely" phase is a poor substitute for a tough-minded politics of the great powers.

Americans should feel relieved that finally, after an intolerable delay, their government has awakened from its slumberous inaction about Soviet technology thieves masquerading as diplomats.

The new American criterion is almost sweetly reasonable and even symmetrical. Let there be equality of numbers. Let the Soviet

and U.S. embassies and prime consulates be limited to staffs of 251.

This still gives the Soviets their huge UN delegation (now somewhat cut) as their extra technological guerrilla warriors.

Soviet diplomacy today is dominated by the technological imperative. It is fair to sum up Gorbachev's current policy as "negotiate and spy, spy and negotiate."

He is driven to both by the sad backwardness of Soviet technology. He has to keep spying in order to narrow the gap between U.S. and Soviet science and technology.

But he also has to keep negotiating for the same reason — to restrict the Strategic Defense Initiative to laboratory research and keep it from moving ahead, while he jogs the Soviet economy out of its almost catatonic inertia.